

# PROBLEMS IN "SPORTS CULTURE"

—An Analysis of Interior Factors—

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## I. *Introductory*

In recent years, especially in Japan, since the 18th Olympic Games were held in Tokyo, there have been ever greater demands for, as well as interest in, sports.

Today, the mass of our people (including those sports fans who belong to no particular organization) feel constrained, no less urgently than the existing athletic organizations, to voice the need for the "popularization of sports."

In England, where modern sports are said to have originated, athletic sports used to be considered as the most effective means of both bourgeois education and bourgeois social intercourse. It is said that the people belonging to that class have monopolized sports by establishing a set of amateur rules, thereby preventing the masses, especially the working classes, from participating in those activities.<sup>1</sup> (The monopolization of sports is not to be confused with the so-called spiral development of sports techniques, which we shall discuss later on.) It is a proven fact that in the Japanese sportsdom before the Taisho era, too, there existed certain amateur rules very much the same as the British ones; and that, because of their existence, only a small minority of privileged students had the exclusive enjoyment of sports, the majority of the populace being deprived of all access to those activities.<sup>2</sup> It can be said, after all, that up to that time class interests had been the major factor that worked as a deterrent to the popularization of sports. This should not blind us, however, to the fact that there were other factors too, inherent in sports themselves, which operated towards creating social conditions unfavourable for their popularization.

The progress of science and technology in modern society has brought about many forces that have tended to negate human nature. Under such circumstances, the first thing that should be safeguarded is the "self-hood" of the individual, for, until he has established this thing, he cannot be expected to live truly like a human being. Sports as particular forms of cultural activity, like the arts in general, represent man's efforts to attain selfhood and creativity. From this point of view, sports may be defined as forms of bodily exercise through which one tries to develop one's efficiency in attaining these two things. It can be said with truth that it is only as such that sports can have cultural values.

Sports are not to be considered merely in terms of their compensatory functions. True,

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<sup>1</sup> Tomohisa Kawaguchi, "The Modernization of Sports and Its Bourgeois Character" in *The Hitotsu-bashi Review*, Vol. 50, No. 6.

<sup>2</sup> Toshio Nakamura, "On Amateurism (I)—The Development of Amateur Rules in Japan" in *Bulletin of Tokyo University of Education's Senior High School* (November, 1959).

they help the individual to win back the essential part of his human nature that has been lost. But their main cultural significance lies in the fact that they can positively assist the individual of achieve his over-all development through the exercise of his bodily faculties. That is why the masses in our country demand a new system of sports—of techniques, organizations and facilities, as well as coaches and trainers—which will guarantee all individuals the enjoyment of sports.<sup>3</sup> It is now recognized that the “popularization of sports” is possible only when all such demands have been satisfied.<sup>4</sup>

On the other hand, our athletic organizations have their own distinctive idea of the “popularization of sports,” which is that our sports population must be immediately increased so that we may attain in sports the world’s top level and constantly remain at it. Analysis of the results of the Tokyo Olympics indicated the need for a rapid increase in our sports population, and all athletic organizations started a movement to increase the participants in sports among the masses, the basic assumption behind this campaign being that the greater the number of people participating in sports, the better chances there are for talented athletes and sportsmen to emerge, which will eventually bring about a higher general level of “sports culture.” Thus, the demands of the masses in our country for the “popularization of sports” must be distinguished from those of the athletic organizations.

It seems that the “popularization of sports” as demanded by the athletic organizations, which aims at discovering promising young talents among the masses and training them into first-rate athletes and sportsmen, can hardly contribute to the general participation in sports. It is true that a gigantic pyramid can be built only upon a vast base.<sup>5</sup> Similarly, a great number of sports participants must be there for a handful of really talented athletes and sportsmen to be born among them. This latter, however, is true only as a general statement. Analysis of the characteristics of our “sports culture” shows that under the existing system of sports techniques, the trends towards the “popularization” and the “improved techniques” of sports are two distinctive things that run counter to each other.

This little paper attempts to clarify these two basic trends in our “sports culture”. It will take up such problems as the notion of competition in sports, sports techniques, their proposed as well as present system, etc. And these will be considered in relation to mass participation in sports. There have been very few studies, if any, which deal with what might be called the “interior principles” determining the existence of sports as an aspect of culture. Therefore, the present study, which proposes to analyse the foundations of “sports culture,” may be said to be a venture into untrodden land. It will inevitably raise more problems than it can solve,

<sup>3</sup> On January 1, 1965, the Sub-Committee of Specialists of the Physical Education Society of Japan, after making a special study on “Principles of Physical Education,” issued a statement on what Japan’s sportsdom ought to be like after the Tokyo Olympics, with the title: “On Policies for Promotion of National Sports.” See Shin Taiiku (*New Physical Education*), Vol. 35, No. 2.

<sup>4</sup> The phrase “popularization of sports” is currently used in a wide range of senses. In general usage, it just denotes a state in which a great number of people are actually engaged in some sports or other, regardless of technical levels. But the term should denote the process in which the majority of the nation approaches the essence of “sports culture,” by acquiring greater skills in games for which their individual talent, interest, and fit them.

<sup>5</sup> Pierre de Coubertin, *Olympische Erinnerungen*, ed. by Carl Diem, tr. by Kenkichi Oshima (The Baseball Magazine Co., Ltd., 1962). In this book, the author says that 50 out of 100 persons who care to build up their constitutions need to engage in sports; that 20 out of such sports players need to specialize in sports; that 5 out of 20 such sports specialists need to possess the very best of all sports techniques (p. 203).

but the writer believes that they are problems that can be, and should be, solved through further scientific research.

## II. *Competition in Sports*

To win a game in a competitive sport, or just to compete in such a game, is in itself a matter of great significance for "sports culture." However, it is not our purpose here to throw light upon the social contexts out of which each competitive sport was born. Nor is it our aim either to determine what particular notions have contributed to the formation of sports theories in its successive stages. What we have to say here is that all sports players, driven by a desire to win games, tend to compete ever more keenly with one another; that their competition, as it becomes keener and keener, gets to involve ever higher techniques, thus helping to accelerate the whole process of "technicalization" in sports. It is our contention that this ever more intensified competition in sports goes a long way towards creating a situation in which only a small minority of players has the exclusive possession of "sports culture," to which the general mass of people are denied all access.

Pierre de Coubertin once said: "L'important dans la vie, ce n'est point le triomphe mais le combat; l'essentiel, ce n'est pas d'avoir vaincu mais de s'être bien battu." These words are not necessarily to be understood as suggesting the essential nature of sports; they are rather to be taken as pointing out some of the evils that modern sports have brought about. In our modern sports system with its hierarchy of techniques, all players are forced to concentrate their energies upon winning games. Or rather, their very desire to "win" games is to be regarded as an inevitable consequence of the development of modern sports.

In order that certain activities may properly be called sports, they must fill three requirements: 1) they must be play of some kind or other, 2) they must contain some elements of contest or combat, and 3) they must involve intensified physical exercise.<sup>6</sup> The second of these, more especially than any of the rest, is believed to form an integral part of all sports. In other words, what gives sports their unique character is the act of struggling on the part of the players in a competition or contest.<sup>7</sup> Forms of struggle may vary according as different sorts of players engage in different sorts of games, to face different sorts of difficulties. Furthermore, the same player or players must act differently under different circumstances. It sometimes happens that a player must vie with his inner self. The majority of modern sports require that more than two players enter into competition. Where two players or teams of players do so, each inevitably has a dominant desire to defeat the other. Each party will want to demonstrate his superior ability to the other by winning the game.<sup>8</sup> Coubertin's urge to "fight well" rather than win a game will have little effect on the players; their desire to win the game will not be lessened in any appreciable degree, for it stems from the essential nature of competitive sports which is extremely powerful.

The competitive character of "sports culture" is unique in that it is determined solely by the fact that games form an integral part of this particular culture. Strictly speaking, competitions in the form of games can hardly exist in any other line of human culture. A game

<sup>6</sup> Bernald Gillet, *Histoire du Sport*, tr. by Hitoshi Kondo, "Que Sais Je?" Library (Hakusuisha), p. 17.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 15.

<sup>8</sup> Johan Huizinga, *Homo Ludens*, tr. by Hideo Takahashi, p. 96.

is a form of activity in which its players, either individually or as a team, demonstrate their mastery through hard scientific training of all necessary techniques in existence, and show that they are going, having enough skill, to devise and develop for themselves more advanced techniques. It is almost inevitable then that the abilities of each individual player or team of players should be evaluated in terms of wins and losses in a game or series of games. Sports players usually feel ashamed when they lose a game. Their sense of defeat is often so strong that they find it almost unbearable to think of any game they have lost. Losers of games often consider themselves as hopeless failures, and are sometimes regarded by the winners as potential dropouts. All this implies that the majority of modern sports players, in their self-titled attempts to pursue "sports culture," derive immeasurable pleasure from winning games. We might even say with a certain measure of appropriateness that the best way to approach the essence of sports is by winning games. Theoretically, therefore, any sports player who has won a game is understood, at that particular moment of glory, to be the possessor of all the techniques and abilities (including physical strength) required by that particular game. And this is the reason why sports players are ranked according to their abilities as revealed in their showing in games, while the players themselves acquiesce to this ranking.

Today, there is a strong tendency to regard the winners of games as superior to the losers not only in athletic ability but in all other qualities. This trend to overestimate the abilities of the winners in games is observed throughout the world in various athletic meets, national and international championships, the Olympic Games, and so on. The high standards set up by a handful of talented sports players tend to be employed in increasing numbers of clubs, schools, local communities, etc., as a yardstick to measure the efficiency of individuals or groups of individuals belonging to them. Under such circumstances, sports players are forced to strive harder and harder to win games at all costs.

In order that a sports player may win a game, he must have a monopoly of all the techniques needed in that game. To beat their opponents, all players, either individually or as a team, usually set for themselves a technical level they should attain before they actually begin to have a game. This level should be high enough for their acquired techniques to remain superior at any time to those of their opponents (who must be expected to be continuing on their own end every effort to surpass them). Thus, there inevitably appears a gap of varying widths between what a specific player or group of players has achieved and what they consider ought to be still achieved by them. And in their efforts to narrow that gap, stimulated by their desire to win games, they develop techniques positively and actively.

What drives them willingly to undergo ever intensified physical training is the desire to achieve the maximum degree of physical efficiency which will enable them to acquire top-level techniques with which to defeat their opponents. In order to win a competitive sports game, all players are required not merely to master the existing techniques or combinations of techniques on all levels, but even to create for themselves new ones which are unknown to others. It is for this reason that, in developing and improving sports techniques as well as methods of physical training, various scientific approaches are being attempted. Naturally, the more advanced and complex sports techniques are, the greater is the amount of time and money needed in acquiring them.

This trend towards accelerating the cultivation of higher techniques of sports regarded as an aspect of culture, is not to be negated in itself, nor to be deplored, either. Nevertheless, it is plain that there is a wide discrepancy between the demands, on one hand, for ever higher



### III. *Sports Techniques and Their System*

One of the features that distinguish sports from other forms of cultural activity is that all sports postulate the existence of such "technique" as will necessitate bodily exercise, to be more specific, the exercise of the "big muscles." Another one is that each sport involves certain characteristic techniques to be mastered by the player.<sup>9</sup>

Now, in order that sports, and sports techniques in particular, may function as means to enhance the value of human existence, they must have a fully reciprocal influence upon the individual sports player. Sports players will always desire to have higher techniques as their physical, muscular strength is increased by improved standards of living (of which one notable example is the habit of eating foods richer in calories). The "improved techniques" of sports, on the other hand, are such that they increasingly demand greater physical capacities or muscular strength on the part of the players. On the other hand, the ever developing sports techniques will help the individual players to develop their bodily as well as mental faculties, including their power of judgment. By the same token, highly developed bodily as well as mental faculties are considered requisite to complete mastery of increasingly difficult techniques. It may be said, then, that sports players desire to make ever higher techniques their own, and that these improved techniques in turn tend to demand ever greater skills on the part of the players. It is, indeed, in this interaction of sports and their players, of sports techniques and the skills attained by the players, that the greatest of the characteristics of "sports culture" is to be found.

It is often said that sports techniques, which should be there to enable all people to improve their lives by developing their physical capabilities effectively, are at present available only to certain limited classes of people; that they are practically inaccessible to the masses. If that is true, there is no question but that "sports culture" is losing its significance and functions. What, then, is the relationship between this particular state of affairs and the 'existing' system of sports techniques?

It would seem that access to sports techniques is free to all individuals, irrespective of their actual or potential abilities. The prevailing view is that mastery of sports techniques depends largely upon whether or not each individual "wills" it. According to which, if an individual fails to master a technique, it is not so much because that technique is too difficult for him as because he has not enough will power, or has not made enough effort to master it. Prevalent also is the thought that true sportsmanship consists in striving to conquer all obstacles that one must face in learning higher technical skills. According to this idea, one can fully appreciate sports, their educational value in particular, only through making special exertions for such purposes.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Sports techniques are generally very complex and varied. The mere act of "running" has a variety of versions. The various forms of running involved in field and track events are quite different from those required in ball games. The act of "throwing" takes different forms in different sports, and each one of these forms has its proper place in each individual sport.

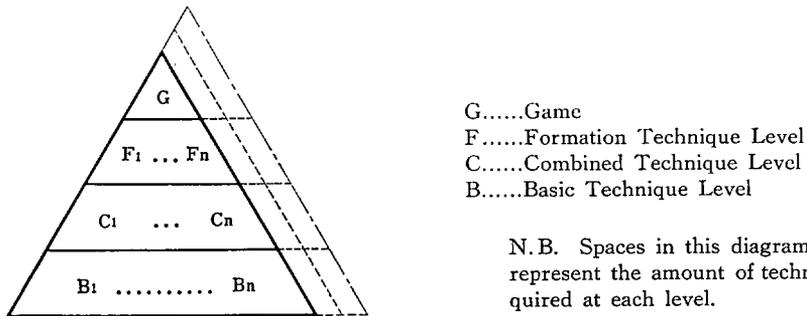
<sup>10</sup> It used to be very much the rule for sports to be regarded mainly as tools for what might be characterized as "Spartan" training. What can definitely be said about sports taught in schools in our country is that emphasis has almost invariably been placed upon "how" to train the students, rather than "what" to train them with. This latter aspect should receive much more attention than before in our future sports education.

However, here is a question to be asked: Is the mastery of sports techniques a problem to be considered solely as a matter of the individual's "will"? The answer must be definitely in the negative. For it often happens that those people who have no natural aptitude, or whose technical skill is below the standard, are for that reason very seldom admitted to athletic clubs, no matter how eagerly they may desire to join them. The general exclusiveness of current sports clubs accounts for the fact that a great number of people who might otherwise have developed into talented sportsmen have given up their favorite sports at an early stage; not infrequently, their enthusiasm cools down. It is true that mastery of highly-developed techniques is inconceivable where there is no passion for it on the part of the learner. But at the same time it must be admitted that among the factors that prevent the majority of people (excepting those few blessed with special talents and other favourable conditions) from acquiring higher technical skills are those which are closely related to the present hierarchic "structure" of sports techniques and the ideas supporting it, or factors independent of the learner's "will."

Sports as an aspect of culture were originally conceived and developed neither as mere forms of play nor as simple means of physical training; their significance has always been sought in their power of enhancing the value of human existence. This we should always keep in mind in our pursuit of "sports culture." We should not merely try to master the 'existing' sports techniques, but to develop them further in the direction suggested above. From this viewpoint it becomes necessary for us to analyse and clarify one interior factor that is hindering the "mass participation in sports," that is, our present system of sports techniques.

All our 'existing' sports<sup>11</sup> may be said to stand at a very high technical level. Consequently, only a small number of talented men blessed with favourable conditions can pursue sports worthy of the name. For, all sports have a single supreme end not easily attainable, only a few talented individuals being able to partake in their essence by attaining that end.

HIERARCHY OF SPORTS TECHNIQUES



In our present system, a game of sport is supported upon a base which might be divided into three levels of technique. These levels may be considered as constituting a hierarchy of

<sup>11</sup> All of the officially recognized sports known to the general public are here meant. What is implied by the adjective "existing" is that the existing sports should re-organized into a new system of technique based upon a fresh notion of "competition." "Simplified" games, "lead up" games, and other such games that are currently played in certain schools have all been devised so as to fit into the existing system. We can hardly think of them as quite up-to-date.

techniques, the game sitting upon its top. They are indicated in the above diagram by B, C, F, and G, representing respectively Basic Technique Level, Combined Technique Level, Formation Technique Level, and G the Game respectively. The three levels are arranged in an ascending order of complexity. Now, all sports techniques are grouped into three classes corresponding to these three levels. To the class of "Basic Techniques" belong those which are the simplest, but the most fundamental. (These "Basic Techniques" themselves are based upon simpler ones such as running, jumping, and throwing.) The class of "Combined Techniques" includes combinations of the more varied, complex sorts of "Basic Techniques." The class of "Formation Techniques" comprises those which enable each player to cope with every conceivable combination of situations that may occur in the game, involving all such elements as time, space, and the other player or players.

One can never fully enjoy or appreciate a sport unless one experiences it in the form of "game." It is only in a game that one can observe all the accumulated top-level sports techniques called into action. It may well be said that a sport displays its essential part in the form of game.<sup>12</sup>

We are naturally led to the conclusion that only those who have mastered all of the three levels of technique can penetrate through games to the essence of sports. For, "sports culture" finds expression only in those games in which all accumulations of techniques are displayed. It is of course an error to think that the techniques and other components which make up a game are all fixed, admitting of no improvement whatsoever. In so far as sports are considered as an aspect of culture, we ought to expect that their techniques will always demand both elevation and expansion. Here the desire common to all human beings for things of higher quality, things more advanced, more excellent, more wonderful, is in operation; it goes a long way towards raising the standards of games on the one hand, and towards widening the range of sports techniques on other. At the same time all this is related to the notion of competition in sports.)

Here we find ourselves in a dilemma. Under the present system of sports techniques, our endeavours to raise technical standards often result in an increase in the number of those who fail to achieve the ultimate end of practicing sports, that is, to penetrate to their essence. In other words, we fail to enlarge what our athletic organizations call "the base of the pyramid of Japanese sportsdom." Talented athletes and sportsmen (especially of the first class) tend progressively to raise technical standards through games, bringing about increased amounts of technique to be mastered by others; while those who are less talented (including those masses who hardly deserve to be called athletes or sportsmen) cannot even hope to penetrate to the essence of sports (which of course is to be reached only through games on higher levels). Most of the latter are obliged to concentrate all their energies upon mastering ever increasing numbers of indispensable "basic techniques." One who has once in the past managed with great effort to attain the highest level of technical skill may not succeed in acquiring the most advanced techniques at present. It often happens that those who have mastered all the highest

<sup>12</sup> We cannot think of any particular sports game without also thinking of the general techniques which go to the making of it. If we think of games independently, we shall have to confine our efforts of pursuing "sports culture" entirely to the task of mastering, creating, and developing techniques, which, to be sure, will give us some pleasure but cannot but work towards turning the game into something of little or no real value. Such a state of affairs obviously is quite unsatisfactory. Only by thinking of a sports game and its constituent techniques as forming a complete unity, we can expect our "sports culture" to have its reason for existence.

techniques cannot remain satisfied with their achievements; they feel constrained to set new goals before them and strive to attain them.

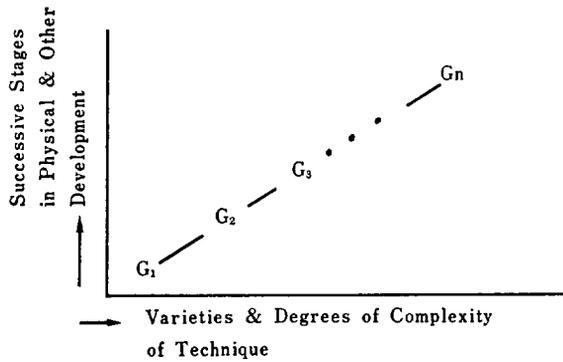
If we think that all the accumulated techniques of certain sports are compressed into games, in which alone the essence of "sports culture" is to be found, we must say that all our attempts to seek that essence on any of the three levels of techniques supporting them will be in vain, as in fact they are. It may be said, in short, that under the present system of sports techniques one can hardly ever penetrate to the essence of sports unless one has developed one's bodily functions well enough to keep up with the ever-rising levels of sports techniques. Even if the external conditions surrounding the 'existing' sports take a turn for the better, so long as the present system of techniques continue, it would be extremely difficult for the masses to penetrate through games to the essence of sports, for their physical capacities are on the whole much limited. True, the mass of people sometimes look as if they were deriving real pleasure from participating in what they naïvely think to be a "game." But the fact is that quite often they are not experiencing the true joy that comes from partaking in the essence of sports. What they are enjoying is either that half-pleasure which they might feel at one stage or another in the process of pursuing "sport culture," or some other pleasure derived from totally different sources. If we confuse these kinds of half-pleasure or pseudo-pleasure with that real pleasure which issues from partaking in the essence of "sports culture," we are simply deceiving ourselves.

From this point of view, it is plain that the movement towards raising the general standard of "sports culture" often runs counter to the one for the "mass participation in sports." If we push the former too far, the masses will inevitably be left behind. If, on the other hand, we try to accelerate the latter process, we shall have to give up raising the general standard of our "sports culture," which ultimately will be reduced to nothing. Ideally, "sports culture" in its own self-motivated spiral movement should go on ascending the scale of values, always in relation to men in their social contexts.<sup>13</sup> Therefore, it is almost impossible under the present system of sports techniques to meet at once the demands for higher techniques of sports and those for greater number of sports participants among the masses.<sup>14</sup>

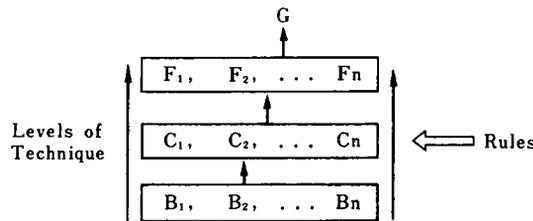
We must conclude, then, that such new system is needed as would satisfy both these demands simultaneously. The new system should be so devised as to allow each individual player to give full scope to their abilities, each according to their degrees of mastery of techniques and their mental as well as physical development. And the forms and contents of individual games should be modified to fit this purpose. Under our proposed system, all games are played on various levels. All games on all levels are played by players who are equal in talent, whose grade of technical skill is considered to match just those games. Each player, no matter what his individual talent may be, is expected to display the very best of the technical skills he has so far mastered; by so doing, he is expected to partake in the essence of the sport he is engaged in. Furthermore, each particular game has its place in one of the larger groupings of sports (e. g., a group of basket-ball games, a group of volley-ball games, etc.). The following chart will illustrate the manner in which a particular game is placed in a group:

<sup>13</sup> Tomohisa Kawaguchi, "Studies in 'Sports Culture' (6)—The Bourgeois Character of 'Sports Culture'," *Taiikuka Kyoiku (Physical Education)* November, 1964.

<sup>14</sup> Tomohisa Kawaguchi, "Studies in 'Sports Culture' (5)—What is the Study of 'Sports Culture'?" *Taiikuka Kyoiku (Physical Education)* August, 1964.



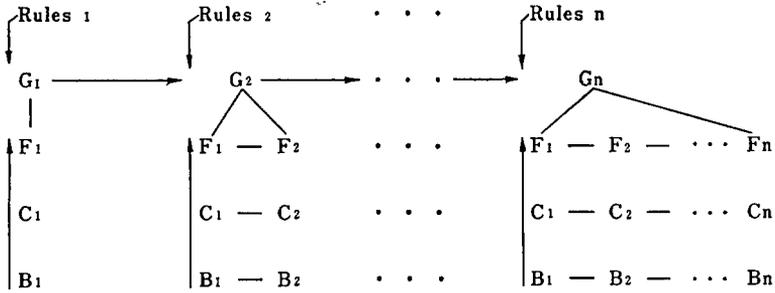
In contrast, the whole hierarchy of sports techniques under the present system may be charted as follows:<sup>15</sup>



This second chart shows plainly enough that in any sports there exists only one game which alone can reveal its essence. And while this one game is based upon all the three levels of technique indicated, theoretically it can be played by none but those few who have mastered all techniques on all levels. It is indeed such structural defects in the present system that have always alienated from the 'existing' sports the masses who ought to be the support and driving force of all culture. As long as the present system remains unaltered, the masses will have to remain excluded from partaking in the essence of "sports culture."

It is our belief that many of the said structural defects can be removed by replacing the present system of sports techniques by a new one. As we have already suggested, under our proposed system all sports games are considered playable on a number of levels. The following chart will serve to illustrate it:

<sup>15</sup> The existing hierarchy of sports techniques shown in this chart is a comprehensive one, including all levels of technique from the simplest to the most complex. Only those who have mastered all the Basic Techniques are thought fit to proceed to learn skills on the Combined Technique Level.



Here, Game<sub>1</sub>, Game<sub>2</sub>, etc. are not to be considered as a succession of preliminary stages culminating in Game<sub>n</sub>, which in the older system was assumed to be *the only* game worthy of the name. In our proposed system, however, each of the games numerically indicated is understood, theoretically, as having its own distinctive existence, revealing in its own way the essence of a particular sport. This notion of a game under our new system is quite different from that of the so-called "lead up" game under the older system, which postulates only one game, and regards all others (which under our new system are "games" in their own right) as mere preliminary steps to that single one.

It stands to reason that the way for "mass participation in sports" can be paved only by dissolving the existing system of sports techniques into components and by re-organizing them into such a system as will enable all classes of people to partake in the essence of sports, and that through participation in games on just such levels as are best suited to their individual abilities.